



## CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

### What is CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS?

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-e-o-sis) is an illness caused by a microscopic parasite *Cryptosporidium parvum*. The disease is often called “crypto.”

### How is this parasite spread?

The *Cryptosporidium* parasite passes in the feces of infected persons and animals. Infection occurs when a person ingests the parasite. Possible ways to be infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Persons who do not wash his/her hands properly after using the restroom or diapering, handling animals or working in the soil.
- Eating food that is not washed after being in soil or water containing *Cryptosporidium*.
- Drinking water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*. Avoid drinking untreated and improperly filtered surface water.
- Swimming or playing in rivers, streams, springs, lakes, swimming pools and water parks contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.
- Exposure to sewage or waste.

### Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Persons with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of being infected after exposure to cryptosporidiosis. Those include people receiving cancer chemotherapy, kidney dialysis, steroid therapy, and people with HIV or Crohn's disease.

### What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom is large amounts of watery diarrhea. Other symptoms are cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache and loss of appetite. Symptoms usually appear within seven days after exposure. Persons with healthy immune systems usually have symptoms for two weeks or less. However, symptoms may last as long as 30 days. During this time, symptoms may come and go. Occasionally, cryptosporidiosis can cause an infection in the gall bladder or the lining of the lung, causing pneumonia. Persons with weak immune systems may have much more severe and long lasting illness. Some persons infected with cryptosporidiosis may not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the parasite to others.

### How do I know if I have cryptosporidiosis?

The feces of the ill person is sent to a laboratory where it is tested.

### How long can an infected person infect others?

The infected person can infect others when symptoms begin and for several weeks after the symptoms disappear. Infected persons who do not have symptoms can still infect others.

### How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Persons generally recover without treatment. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids. Medicine used to control diarrhea sometimes helps. Cryptosporidiosis can be very serious and even cause death in persons with weakened immune systems. Persons with a weakened immune system should call their physician if they suspect they have cryptosporidiosis.